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ABSTRACT

This project was undertaken with the objective of offering the police departments involved an acceptable and feasible way to extend to their members an insight into the complexities and problems of the people with whom they must deal. Small group discussion was utilized, and the seminars dealt with human dynamics, communication breakdowns, crime and delinquency, leadership and fellowship, and urban problems. Results from a questionnaire administered during the last session of each seminar showed a great deal of acceptance by the officers for the small group interaction approach, as well as for the topics presented and discussed. A particularly significant result was the feeling by most participants that someone was concerned with their needs and feelings and would be in a position, perhaps, to communicate their frustrations and suggestions to the top command. One tentative conclusion drawn was that the officers gained a better understanding of urban problems and the ticklish position in which they are placed as enforcers of the law in twentieth century, urban society. (Author/TA)

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SMALL GROUP INTERACTION APPROACH
TO POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS TRAINING
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The policeman continually feels that his life is in danger: If he does not get the criminal, the criminal will get him. The policeman often feels himself alienated, he feels that he must prove his masculinity. Past approaches to police-community relations have been to set up a separate branch of officers to provide the police-community relations services. This, as Black and Labes (1967) state, is like extending the olive branch in one hand and the night stick in the other. If the system is going to work, one should either remove the policeman's alienation, or, preferably, the alienated policeman, if he cannot be saved. At least, we can seek to help the majority of the policemen now on duty so that they do not look upon every arrest as a test of their masculinity.

Each peace officer should be a community relations agent for the police -- on and off duty. In his every contact with citizens, he modifies the public image of the police and, thereby, sets the tone for later police-community contacts.

For years, researchers have sought means to help policemen be better public servants, while helping the community accept and appreciate their function. One key to the cure is to find new and better ways to make both the community and the

police realize that the police are an integral part of the communities they serve. This, in part, is the philosophy behind the small group interaction approach to police-community relations.

Policemen must be professionals. Heretofore, police training has centered largely on the purely technical skills of policemen -- self defense, search and seizure, arrests, handling firearms, etc. These are vital parts of policing. Yet policemen must now be more than technicians; they must be artists skilled in the art of meeting the community as persons able and willing to communicate, understand, and help others. Policemen cannot be professionals, no matter how impressive their arrest records or their investigative techniques, without recognizing the sociological and psychological impact they can have on the community.

All policemen must now be equipped with at least a basic understanding of human behavior, attitudes, and motivation. Police need not be social workers or psychoanalysts, but the need for law enforcement officials to understand and be personally involved in people is crucial.

The current attitudes of police toward community, and conversely, of community members toward policemen, have developed as a result of, for the most part, the vicarious experiences of each with the other and the general lack of meaningful communication between the two.

Officers, as full-time police-community relations agents, must make it their concern to know and evaluate the needs of a

community.

There has been little need for teaching our police that the average middle-class or working-class white man is a human being with feelings, problems, and hang-ups who needed to be treated humanely, because it was from these ranks that most policemen have come. However, with the increasing voice that our inner cities have achieved, the policeman has been attacked by many for his inability to understand the problems and frames of reference of the inner city inhabitants. The difficulty has arisen because of the frustration faced by the individual officer as he attempts to deal with a person from a culture he cannot completely understand. In concert with and as a response to this, the young are beginning to present unexpected problems for the community.

The growing consciousness of this problem has led social scientists to insist that policemen receive more specialized training to aid in the required interaction with these ethnic and racial groups. However, short of requiring a college education with extended study in social science, most police officers have had little opportunity to gain an increased awareness and understanding of the problems facing them. Since the possibility mentioned above is not now feasible, for many officers, another method must be found. If no solution is forthcoming, large and small cities face much grief as the two sides (police and antagonists) continue to clash in many small skirmishes which can only lead to greater frustration on both sides.

Method

The objectives of the project were to offer the police departments an acceptable and feasible way to extend to their members an insight into the complexities and problems of the people with whom they must deal. Face to face confrontations and lectures have not been notably affective, and have often been disastrous.

Beginning with the landmark research of Kurt Lewin in the 1940's, it has been demonstrated (also Bloom, 1953) that "Lecturing may lead to a high degree of interest. It may affect the motivation of the listener. But it seldom brings about a definite decision on the part of the listener to take a certain action at a specific time." The mass approach places "...the individual in a quasi-private, psychologically isolated situation with himself and his own ideas. Although he may, physically, be part of a group listening to a lecture, he finds himself, psychologically speaking, in an 'individual situation.'" (Lewin, 1958, p. 203) Lewin adds "Lecturing is a procedure in which the audience is chiefly passive. The discussion, if conducted correctly, is likely to lead to a much higher degree of involvement" (Lewin, 1958, p. 202). If we are seeking to develop attitudes, we cannot afford to stress only information (McKeachie, 1962). As Lewin and others (Dressel, 1958; Meyer, 1936; Terry, 1933) have amply demonstrated in their research, if commitment is to obtain, small group discussion must be utilized.

In the present study, small groups of 12 to 15 police

officers met in seminar fashion with two program directors who sat opposite each other at all times. While one spoke, the other would monitor the group for signs of interest loss or misunderstanding. The directors of the program were both Social Scientists in social psychology and political science. One or the other was periodically spelled by other behavioral scientists with some law enforcement experience or by a police officer with social science training. The program ran from July 1, 1969 to June 30, 1970, at which time 130 patrolmen and recruits had been contacted.

Each course lasted 10 hours, with two classes of two hours each, per week.

1. HUMAN DYNAMICS -- What is man, how does he develop?
2. USE AND ABUSE OF WORDS -- How and why do communications break down?
3. CRIME AND DELINQUENCY -- Dynamics of Delinquency
4. LEADERSHIP -- Understanding the frame of reference of the followers.
5. URBAN PROBLEMS -- The physical city and its social atmosphere.

The seminar discussions were tied together so that one flowed into the next. Stress was placed on the continuity of human interaction, as opposed to the discontinuity too often stressed, even in our colleges. Officers were encouraged to offer personal beat-problems for group consideration. In addition to these impromptu cases, actual case histories of the Louisville Police Department were used in each seminar discussion to provide a test situation in which the officers might apply the new knowledge they had gained.

The first session of each five session seminar was begun with a group interaction exercise such as an adaptation of the prisoner's dilemma game or the moon trip necessity checklist exercise, in order to both break the ice and develop an understanding of the need for cooperation in human interaction.

Program directors continually accompanied requesting officers during duty hours, both day and night, to better understand their problems and procedures.

Since it has been noted that the term "Police-Community Relations" has become anathema to the average policeman throughout the country, because of the, often, one-sided militant diatribes leveled against them in such programs, the program was titled "Police Leadership Seminar." It quickly became clear that the seminar was geared toward community relations, but, by this time, a trust of the directors and an interest in the material had been developed. Stressed throughout was the fact that the directors were not there to "tell them how to be good policemen," but to provide them with information upon which they could draw for frames of reference in deciding how to handle their day to day problems.

Results

Questionnaires. In order to evaluate the approach, an anonymous questionnaire was administered during the last session of each seminar. (see Table 1)

Insert Table 1 about here

The results from this questionnaire are quite favorable and show a great degree of acceptance on the part of the officers for the small group interaction approach as well as for the material presented and discussed.

Each officer, with the exception of one, enthusiastically stated that, although he began with much trepidation, many new insights had been gained. A particularly significant result was the feeling evinced by most participants that someone was concerned about their needs and feelings and would perhaps be in a position to communicate, to the top command, their frustrations and suggestions, anonymously, thus providing somewhat the same services as an ombudsman.

This preliminary evaluative technique lends credence to the tentative conclusion that the officers are gaining a better understanding of urban problems and the ticklish position in which they are placed as enforcers of the law in our 20th century urban society. Hopefully, their increased knowledge and understanding of urban problems and community relations will have an influence on their actions and behavior as they perform their law enforcement duties.

Evaluative support has also been forthcoming from the Director of Safety, Col. George C. Burton, and the Chief of Police, Col. C.J. Hyde, who stated: "Officers from the rank of Patrolman to Assistant Chief of Police have been among the different classes completed. The value of this training program, in my opinion, is best evaluated by the noticeable change in attitudes in officers of all ranks that have completed this

two weeks' training, toward the management problems experienced not only at the Chief's Office level but at district and bureau levels. Suggestions by the graduates of these classes for the betterment of the Department have been more numerous and when criticism is experienced they are usually accompanied by a suggestion for improvement. The attitudes toward the public served also mirrors the positive aspects to this training program."

Discussion and Conclusions

Throughout this presentation, reference has been made to the psychosocial factors associated with the manner in which members of a particular community act. It is important that officers realize that certain types of crime can be associated with areas of low income, broken homes, unemployment, and a variety of other neighborhood characteristics. Though police are not in a position to remove all causes of crime, it is possible to make oneself familiar with certain correlates of criminal behavior. To do this, police must contact the community and learn about it from within. Police isolation, the association of peace officers only with fellow officers, is a primary reason why police either are not aware of the sociological characteristics of an area or do not make full use of this information. Sociologists study the group composition of society and the manner in which groups function. They become aware of the physical cultural characteristics of an area, as well as the effects of group activity on the general attitudes of the community. Policemen, too, must be attentive to the functioning

and characteristics of groups and areas, for these largely determine the values and attitudes toward law enforcement and the police to be found in an area. It is the policeman's responsibility to know his community and how to communicate with it. From such knowledge and subsequent actions will police relations become community relations.

Table 1

Percentages of Responses to Post Seminar Questionnaire

Question #1

What did you expect to find in the leadership seminar?

Brain washing----- 25.5%

Leadership traits lecture----- 28.16%

Unknown----- 22.0%

Question #2

What did you find?

Interesting Free Discussion (Informative)----- 36.49%

Understanding of Race and Urban Problems----- 23.14%

Nothing New----- 9.79%

Question #3

Do you feel that you received any new insights or ideas?

Yes----- 82.77%

No----- 10.68%

Question #4

Did the seminar approach, as opposed to a lecture, allow you to become more involved and, thereby, get your own ideas across?

Yes----- 96.6%

No----- 0.84%

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